

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE IMPERATIVE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ECOCRITICAL RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE SWAMP DWELLERS*

Dr. ONYEKACHI ENI

Senior Academic, Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

*The paradox of human existence derives from the fact that wo/man's relentless struggle for survival is denominated by acts of self-destruction. This paper interrogates the linkage between wo/man's cornucopian impulse and the burgeoning incidence of climate change with regard to the habitability of the earth and the survivability of humankind. Using Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* (1961) as its exploratory point of departure, this paper posits that the thematization of global warming in the work under focus is a vista of ecopedagogy for environmental sensitization and sustainable development. With ecocriticism as its theoretical canvas, this paper contends that the perversity of drought, flood, pollution and food shortage constitutes a cumulative ecological response to the overexploitation of environmental resources. The paper recommends, among others, a bioethical approach to environmental relations to conserve the stock of natural capital and meet the needs of the present generation without compromising on the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

KEYWORDS: *Ecocritical, Environment(al), Climate Change, Sustainable Development, Humankind & Wo/man*

Received: Dec 03, 2019; **Accepted:** Dec 23, 2019; **Published:** Jan 30, 2020; **Paper Id.:** IJELFEB20203

1. INTRODUCTION

The incidence of deforestation, accumulation and disposition of nuclear and other hazardous substances has found expression in the phenomenon of climate change with persistent drought, low harvests, diseases and poverty, as part of its collateral consequences. This paper examines the intervention of literature in the perversity of climate change using Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* (1961), as its analytical canvass. From the theoretical perspective of ecocriticism, this paper interrogates the linkage between human activities and climate change. The paper recommends the adoption of sustainable development practices to temper humankind's anthropocentric impulses, which cumulatively threatens human existence.

In spite of the avalanche of critical opinions and scholarly elucidations on Wole Soyinka's works in general and *The Swamp Dwellers* in particular, there exists an alarming silence with respect to the examination of the ecocritical trajectory of Soyinka's artistic orbit. While scholars such as Roscoe (1965), Anne (1991), Jeyifo (2004), Layiwola (1996) and Shabir (2011), among others, have focused on Soyinka's artistic and philosophical originality; others such as Ugwuanyi (2011), Gyamfi (1997) and Fraser-Green (1989), to mention only a few, have dealt with his beliefs, social vision and political commitment as a writer. While the explanation for the paucity of eco-critical scholarship on Soyinka's works may remain at the realm of conjecture, it is not unreasonable to volunteer that the relative recency of ecocriticism as a framework of literary criticism may be accountable for the apparent lacuna, having regard to the historical epoch when most of Soyinka's works were produced. To the best

of this writer's knowledge, the major scholarly works on Soyinka from an ecocritical perspective include: Slaymaker (2001/2007), Tarkafai (2010), Mwepu (2015) and Uzoji (2017). Of these, while Mwepu focuses on the post-colonial and eco-critical reading of *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Swamp Dwellers*, Uzoji focuses on the genre of protest drama and eco-literacy within the ambit of Nigeria's Niger Delta with only a passing reference to Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers*.

As though to personally draw global attention to the ecocritical significance of the work, Soyinka in an essay: "Swamp Dwellers Revisited" in *The New York Times* (2010) states that "my play, *The Swamp Dwellers* has little to do with what had triggered the idea. My compulsive dialogue with nature took over. The economic consequences of the impact of a global scramble for our wealth hovered only dimly in the background". While the above is clearly an eco-critical intervention on the work by Soyinka in his autonomous office as an essayist and critic, the thrust of this paper is the analysis of the trajectories of climate change in *The Swamp Dwellers*, as a pedagogical exhortation on the necessity of sustainable development practices. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, the scenes and incidents are tempered by the vagaries of the weather and their impact on the lives and landscape of the swamp community. In the play, the triumphs and travails of the old man, Makuri and members of his household emblemize the entire community, as they constitute the window through which the confrontation of the people with the forces of nature are artistically foregrounded. The play dramatizes the hopes, aspirations and frustrations of an agrarian society, where socio-economic fortunes are determined by natural and supernatural forces.

2. THE ECOCRITICAL CANVAS

In spite of its relative recency and the diversity of perspectives as to its history and canonical thrust, there is hardly any dispute that ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, which brings together literature and the environment. The rise of the ecocritical temper followed the increasing awareness and realization of the danger, which human activities on earth posed to the survival of humankind, and the need to deploy the instrumentality of literature to stem the tide of wo/man's anthropocentric impulse. According to the pathfinders and proponents of ecocriticism, such as Buell (1995), Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), Heise (1999), Enger and Smith (2006) among others, the goal of ecocriticism is the deconstruction of the misguided notion of oppositional relationship between wo/man and nature and to reconstruct their interdependence and mutuality in the interest of both. Contemporary experience demonstrates that injury and degradation of the three principal domains of the environment: land space, air space and marine space, find expression in sundry acts of pollution **vide** human activities. As Acholonu (1995) has noted, in spite of the fact that the destruction of the environment by humankind embodies collateral threat to the well-being and survival of humanity, modern civilization, science and technology are either disabled from or not properly oriented to solving environmental crisis, a situation which invites literature to the fray. The idea is that environmental pollution, in its various ramifications, starts with a polluted and misguided mind, which views the environment as a socio-economic bounty for the egotistical enjoyment of humankind. According to Acholonu, in order to reconfigure the relationship between wo/man and the environment, "literature should, therefore, be made to appeal to the intellect and emotions of human beings, to empower them to be decisive in revamping the health of the earth. [Wo]man should, through the depiction of the unfriendliness between nature and human beings, know that all forms of life have an inherent right to exist..." (29).

By deploying literature to the ends of environmental advocacy, Caminero-Santangelo (2007) views ecocriticism as a goal-driven vehicle for the propagation of "the ethical position that humans need to do away with anthropocentrism by rejecting the nature-culture dualism, which objectivizes nature and places the category of culture/humanity at the centre

of things” (699). In the final analysis, the oil that lubricates the engine of ecocriticism is the principle of conservation, which Prasanth (2018) has described as a recognition that “the destruction and depletion of nature is suicidal; it ultimately leads to the destruction of humanity”. Prasanth’s view that “the most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to the predicament of [wo]man in a threatened natural world” resonate with ecoactivists and ecocritics. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka dramatizes the dialectical relationship between human and non-human factors, as a pedagogical blueprint for sustainable development. The play opens with a most evocative and compelling ecocritical signature revealing the setting as “a village in the swamps” which is deeply steeped in “frogs, rain and other swamp noises” (TSD, 1). As the play begins, the old woman, Alu, wife of Makuri, is wondering about her son, Igwezu, who has gone to the swamp to check his farm. Igwezu himself is a city returnee, who has come back to the village in search of socio-economic and spiritual anchor, having been defeated and frustrated by the city. While Alu and her husband Makuri are expectant of Igwezu’s formal arrival, a blind beggar from the northern village of Bukanji arrives at the homestead of the Makuris and knocks at the door.

The beggar had left his village on account of excessive drought, which scorched everything and occasioned famine. Through the agency of flashback, the beggar appraises the audience of the past about Bukanji village; that it used to be dry but people still lived peacefully until the rains came. It was the most magnificent time as people tilled the land and grew different crops in a green and luxuriant landscape. The people bonded even more, both among themselves and with nature. Then came the locusts, sudden climate change and excessive drought. Like many others, the Beggar left Bukanji village, which is now reduced to a community of beggars, and though blind, he left Bukanji in search of water and arable land, and found himself in the land of the swamp dwellers. When Igwezu arrives home, he is disappointed because instead of a bounteous harvest and celebratory feasts, he is greeted with emptiness and frustration, as excessive flood, bearing oil waste from oil companies has destroyed his crops. Igwezu announces how his twin brother, Awuchike has become wealthy in the city through timber merchandize. He voices his sense of betrayal because his brother, Awuchike took his wife and finally announces that Awuchike is dead to his family. Later, Igwezu disagrees with his father, and with Kadiye, the Priest of the serpent of the swamp about the restoration of the land. Igwezu insists that regardless of the steadfast sacrifices of the people to the serpent and notwithstanding the declared commitment of the gods to restore the land, nothing changes. Owing to a combination of factors, Igwezu’s crops are totally destroyed by flood.

3. THE TRAJECTORIES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka allegorically confronts the problem of climate change and the role of humankind in its eventuation. According to Bodansky (1993), climate change refers to a rise in the average global temperature due to increased concentration of atmospheric greenhouse gases resulting in global climatic shifts. This occurs when the proportion of such greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) is excessive, leading to atmospheric destabilization in terms of global warming [451]. Climate change arises from unfair human relationships with nature, which finds expression in persistent drought, low harvest and diseases and poverty. The causes of climate change include deforestation, reliance on fossil fuels for energy, accumulation and disposition of nuclear and other hazardous substances, etc. To sensitize and mobilize global action against the phenomenon of climate change, the United Nations articulated an international roadmap for its containment by way of the “Framework Convention on Climate Change” (UNFCCC). The convention, a by-product of the 1992 Earth Summit, came into force in May 1992 with the stated objective “to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a low enough level to

prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (UNFCCC, 1992). The spirit and letter of the convention was improved upon by the subsequent Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC, which was adopted in December, 1997. Though yet to come into force, the Protocol went several steps further than the Convention itself by categorizing the various countries in terms of their level of industrialization, in addition to establishing binding commitments for the more advanced countries (2015).

In Africa, prominent ecoactivists and ecowriters, such as Wangari Maathai, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Ken Saro Wiwa, Ali Mazurui, Wole Soyinka, among others, have placed the challenge of climate change on the **front burner**. Wangari Maathai (2009), for instance, has warned of the dire consequences of climate change in Africa if remedial measures are not adopted. According to her, “Africa is the continent that will be hit the hardest by climate change. Unpredictable rains and floods, prolonged droughts, subsequent crop failures and rapid desertification, among other signs of global warming, have in fact already begun to change the face of Africa” [1]. These adverse effects of climate change are exactly as depicted in *The Swamp Dwellers*: “unpredictable rains in Bukanji and the swamp community, prolonged droughts in Bukanji, floods in the swamp community, crop failures in the swamp, epitomized by the wholesale damage of Igwezu’s farm and acute desertification in Bukanji,” etc. In terms of substance and consequence, it seems that Maathai’s description of the impact of climate change mirrors Soyinka’s portraiture of the conditions in *The Swamp Dwellers*. Furthermore, the ecocritical significance of *The Swamp Dwellers* is accentuated by the fact that as Amokaye (2014) has noted, “Nigeria, like many other developing countries, is vulnerable to the impact of climate change, given its high dependence on climate-induced events, such as rain-fed agriculture, livestock and hydropower” [627]. The result is that at present, Nigeria’s contribution to the global stock of greenhouse gases is induced by such factors as energy production and consumption, population explosion and land use practices [628]. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, the playwright problematizes the issue of climate change by showing the relationship between flood, drought, crop failure, contamination of water and air spaces on the one hand and the human activities, which induced them on the other. Emblematic of the fate of other farmers in the flood-ridden community, Makuri states of Igwezu’s farm:

Not a grain was saved, not one tuber in the soil ... and what the flood left behind was poisoned by the oil in the swamp water [shakes his head] ... It is hard for him, coming back for a harvest that is not there (*TSD*, 17).

In this passage, the playwright not only deals with the problem of flood and crop failure resulting from climate change but also alludes to environmental pollution caused by mindless oil exploration and exploitation in Nigeria; a situation which Soyinka, elsewhere (2010), attributes to “corporate irresponsibility of bounty hunters.” In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka deploys the metaphor of “bounty hunting” as a means of demonstrating wo/man’s quest for wealth, and the injurious exploitation of environmental resources. Makuri states: “The land is big and wide, Alu, and you were often out by yourself, digging for crabs, and there were all those shifty-eyed traders, who came to hunt for crocodile skins” (*TSD*, 7). Shifty-eyed traders and crocodile skins are imagistic dramatization of resource exploitation by fortune seekers. Remarkably, the metaphor of “bounty hunting” is a pervasive trope throughout *The Swamp Dwellers*. For instance, as part of the ecocritical denunciation of the phenomenon of deforestation, the playwright artistically presents Awuchike, Igwezu’s twin brother, as a wealthy timber merchant. Thus, in order to satisfy his craving for material wealth, Awuchike engages in the wanton exploitation of forestry resources without considering its collateral impact on the stability of the ecosystem (*TSD*, 31). Through the passage, Soyinka not only draws attention to the menace of deforestation underpinned

by anthropocentric motivation but also artistically underscores the nexus between deforestation and global warming. This is so because, as Omaka (2018) has pointed out, “forests play a vital role in carbon sequestration and, therefore, in global climate regulation as well as in regulating local air quality and rainfall patterns”. Gumo *et al* (2012) elucidates the linkage between the depletion of forestry resources and climate change when they note that “the killing of sacred animals, felling of sacred trees and destruction of sacred spaces in the forest only meets with spiritual disapproval, which manifests itself in the form of great droughts of disease outbreaks, this means that anthropocentrism is at the basis of many environmental disasters” [527].

In addition to the nexus between deforestation and global warming, Soyinka further demonstrates that the selfish and wealth-driven exploitation of environmental resources is antithetical to wo/man's self-preservatory impulse. Thus, in addition to the fact that Awuchike is wealthy through timber merchandising, we also learn that he is symbolically “dead”, both to his family and to the society at large (TSD, 31-32). In declaring Awuchike dead, Igwezu refers to spiritual death as well as a physical and emotional disconnection between him and his family; the contemptuous objectification and abandonment of nature and an act of suicide. This is so because in making money through the destruction of the environment, Awuchike unwittingly destroys himself and also destroys the filial cord with his biological family. Mwepu (2015) graphically captures the cultural and ecocritical import of Awuchike's death metaphor, when he notes that “Awuchike's death can be apprehended culturally and ecocritically, as a metaphor”. Relatedly, Soyinka uses the metaphor of death arising from Awuchike's mindless and suicidal felling of trees to make money, as an artistic device to **foreground** his loss of humanity, and the devaluation of his spiritual and ethical essence. This finds expression in Awuchike's seduction of and adulterous relationship with his twin brother's wife, Desala, which leaves Igwezu forlorn and heartbroken (TSD, 36).

It is to be noted that apart from the direct consequences of climate change evident in diverse environmental problems, *The Swamp Dwellers* also demonstrate that the phenomenon of climate change accentuates demographic displacement and environmental migrancy. This is because, as Toulmin (2009) has noted, “climate change could lead many people to migrate to areas with better conditions” [119]. The Beggar emerges as a symbol of the displaced migrants forced by drought and famine to leave Bukanji in search of water and arable land. States the Beggar: “I headed away from my home, and set my face towards the river... toward any river, towards any stream; set my face towards the sea itself, but let there be water, because I am sick of the dryness” [TSD, 26]. Similarly, Awuchike, Igwezu and others symbolize the youths forced to migrate from the flood-ridden village in search of wealth and self-actualization in the city. As Igwezu is about to flee the village, he states to the Beggar: “Only the children and the old stay here, bondsman. Only the innocent and the dotards” [TSD, 41]. It is instructive that climate-induced displacement and migration are attended with collateral difficulties. In the case of the Beggar, he is confronted with the crisis of scarcity and competition for land. He pleads for any land space to live and sets up a farm, but he is informed that none is available for a stranger [TSD, 17]. The corollary of the foregoing is that *The Swamp Dwellers* emerges as an ecocritical treatise depicting an archetypal village, where the wanton exploitation of environmental resources gives rise to climate change with its attendant consequences. Thus, humankind's overexploitation of nature through timber logging, oil exploration and overall environmental fortune-hunting have occasioned a natural reprisal in global warming, as expressed in flood, drought and food shortage, all of which are inimical to the survival of wo/man.

4. THE POETICS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The taxonomy of eco-aesthetics evinces three main perspectives to environmental relations. From environmental law prism, Amokaye (2014) conterminously categorizes these perspectives as the theories of environmental protection, namely: the school of economic growth, the school of deep ecology and the school of sustainable development [12]. In spite of the absence of consensus among ecocritics as to the purpose, methodology and scope of ecocriticism, mainstream eco-esthetical thought tends to fall within the above three frameworks. Enger and Smith (2006), for instance, have identified what they regard as the three primary theories of moral responsibility to the environment: the anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric (ecocritical) canons, which are roughly equivalent to the economic growth, deep ecology and sustainable development connotations. In order to better appreciate the sustainable development thrust of *The Swamp Dwellers*, it is necessary to first situate the work within the contexts of economic growth and deep ecology.

The economic growth theory is rooted in the dominion principle and founded on the Judeo-Christian social thought (The Holy Bible, Genesis 1:26–28). It is regarded as an extreme approach to environmental relations to the extent that it regards wo/man as the centerpiece of all existence. According to Decleris (2014), the thrust of the anthropocentric temper is the conception of [wo]man, as the paragon of the earth without whom the world would seem to be without purpose. The conception of wo/man as the crowning glory of the earth informs the dominion mindset that all available environmental resources are for her/his benefit to be exploited as s/he deems fit. The inadequacy of anthropocentrism as a framework for environmental relations stems from its extremism, and its failure to recognize and harmonize the rights and interests of human and non-human components of the ecosystem. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka seems to clothe the timber merchant, Awuchike, the unnamed traders in crocodile skins and the bounty-hunting oil companies with the garb of anthropocentrism, and dramatizes its dangers in the form of flood, drought, crop failure and water pollution. Gras (2001) captures the danger of a materialist conception of nature as follows: “The catastrophe that awaits us is due to anthropocentrism. We ignore nature except as a material resource to serve human ends, as we continue to exploit nature we take on a bogus position with it, harming both nature and ourselves” [65].

Sequel to the limitations of the humanist or economic growth framework for environmental relations, deep ecology has come to be regarded as an alternative mode of environmental thought, otherwise called as pure ecology; deep ecology advocates a return to simple ways of managing nature. According to Amokaye (2014), it focuses on evolution, the organicity of the ecosystem and the conservation of the species, without placing special rights on wo/man [16]. As a counterpoise to anthropocentrism, deep ecology is essentially anti-development. It stresses the disastrous effects of industrialization and recommends its abandonment because any kind of development leads to the depletion of the natural capital with attendant environmental burdens. This explains why the centre point of deep ecology is the extension or broadening of the conception of the global community to include human and non-human life forms as well as the physical environment. According to Redgwell (1996), the thesis of deep ecology is that nature and the ecosystem are bioethical, and that they have their own intrinsic worth regardless of their utility or otherwise to the human species.

We find in *The Swamp Dwellers*, what may be regarded as the vestiges of deep ecology in the deliberate non-exploitation of certain strategic environmental resources, which are vital for the maintenance of the balance of the ecosystem. In this regard, the “ageless Iroko trees” readily come to mind (*TSD*, 17). On the other hand, they constitute the boundary markers between the environmental resources that can be exploited and the ones that the community would not interfere with on account of their non-material importance. Thus, the **iroko** trees are enduring monuments of Earth care,

and their presence underscores the respect and commitment to environmental conservation. This is because despite recurrent agricultural operations over the years, the natural limits have not been breached. Mwepu (2015) drives this point home when he notes that “the iroko trees not only preserve the limits but also provide oxygen and photosynthesis and serve as the dwelling place for ancestors and other spirits”. This is deep ecology at its best.

However, neither the presence of the “ageless iroko trees” (*TSD*, 17) nor the undisturbed flow of the different rivers, whose intersection formed the conjugal bridal bed for Makuri and Alu (*TSD*, 9), is any help in staving off the menace of flood, water contamination and crop failure, all of which threaten the survival of the villagers. As mirrored in *The Swamp Dwellers*, on account of its overemphasis on the intrinsic worth of non-human components of the ecosystem and the equality of all the species, deep ecology is inadequate as a framework for environmental thought. This is because, as Amokaye (2014) has pointed out, it tends to ignore the fact that human beings have unique qualities, which distinguish them from other living things. It, therefore, fails to prioritize the harmonization of the co-existence of natural and cultural development (17). Consequent upon the limitations of anthropocentrism, and deep ecology as principles of environmental relations, sustainable development has emerged as an alternative framework for the harmonization of the interests of humankind with the rights of the ecosystem. As an alternative theory of environmental protection, sustainable development is concerned with the maintenance of equilibrium between humankind and the nature for their co-evolution. The epicenter of sustainable development is the conservation and recovery of natural capital as well as the inclusion of environmental and socio-economic criteria in planning and implementation of development policies. It seeks to guarantee an increase in a country's wealth production without a parallel reduction or degradation of its natural capital. This ensures inter-generational equity in that it requires that a country's natural capital be conserved and passed on to future generations.

The principle of sustainable development was given prominence by the World Commission on Environment (1987), headed by Gro Brundtland whose report defined it as:

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs... A process of change in which exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony, and enhance both current and future potentials to meet human needs and aspiration [43].

According to Worika (2012), sustainable development is founded on four core principles, namely: intergenerational equity; sustainable use; intergenerational equity and the principle of integration. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka **thematizes** the imperative of sustainable development by exposing the limitations of anthropocentrism and biocentrism as vistas of environmental relations. This falls within the paradigm of eco-pedagogy, which Uzoji (2018) conceives as the reversal of destructive environmental exploitation and the awakening of a multi-disciplinary approach to peace, safe earth and sustainability. In the confrontation between Igwezu and Kadiye (the Priest of the Serpent) on how best to effectuate the restoration of the land, Soyinka poeticizes sustainable development as an ecocritical paradigm. Through Igwezu, the playwright shows that no amount of sacrifices will make any difference to the subsisting environmental problems, which are the direct consequences of climate change arising from human activities. Consequently, he is, therefore, dismissive of the priest whom he thinks is robbing people's sacrifices in the name of the serpent. He declares:

Igwezu: I know that the floods can come again, that the swamp will continue to laugh at our endeavors. I know that we can feed the serpent of the swamp and kiss Kadiye's feet – but the vapors will still rise and corrupt the tassels of the corn (*TSD*, 39).

The unmistakable ecocritical import of the passage is that flood, pollution and other environmental problems are the product of unsafe human relationship with nature. This represents an ecopedagogical exhortation of humankind on the imperative of a constructive and forward-looking disposition to environmental resources. Another important window to the sustainable development preoccupation of the play is the acknowledgement by the community (represented by Makuri) that though the people cultivate the land for their survival, they nevertheless do so from the mindset of tenants and occupiers rather than owners of the land, which according to him belongs to the serpent and not the people. To the Beggar's request to be a given land to cultivate, Makuri queries:

You wish to rob the serpent of the swamps? You wish to take food out of his mouth...
What is ours is ours, but what belongs to the serpent may never be taken away from him (*TSD*, 17–18).

By portraying the people as land occupiers rather than land owners, Soyinka thematizes the importance of temperance and moderation in the exploitation of environmental resources bearing in mind that the land does not belong to humans but to a superior power who will exercise ultimate discretion as to what happens to the land and the resources thereon. Mwepu (2015) underscores the sustainable development mindset of the people of the swamp when he avers that Makuri stands for the traditional Africans, who exploited the land while also preserving it for the future generation adding that "it is an act of humility for Makuri to recognize that the land does not indeed belong to humans but to the serpent." Gumo *et al.* (2000) supports this view by asserting that humility and respect for nature are immanent in the African sensibility and that "conservation values have grown out of the awareness that natural resources are part of that which ordinary humans do not control, invent or create" (526 –527). The underlying ecocritical import of the people's acknowledgment of their status as occupiers rather than owners of the land is that they are only a component of the ecosystem and not its master, which evinces limitation in terms of environmental resource exploitation.

Furthermore, the cyclical movement of Igwezu from the village to the city, back to the village and again to the city are metaphors for the futility of wo/man's search for peace and self-actualization in the absence of a corresponding change of attitude. Consequently, Igwezu's movement to the city in the first place is to search for wealth (like other youths), but the overall hostility of the city frustrates his ambition, for which he returns to the village hopping to find solace in his farm. However, the comprehensive destruction of his farm by the flood and his irreverent confrontation with Kadiye (the priest of the serpent) entails his eventual exile back to the city, which makes his entrapment run full circle. However, it is to be noted that Igwezu's initial return to the swamp village from the city constitutes an attempt to reconnect with nature. The ecocritical significance of his return is that it embodies his hope to see the swamp recover its fertility if humans change their attitude towards other humans and non-humans. The clear implication is that if tempered exploitation of environmental resources replaces mindless resource overexploitation (represented by the traders in crocodile skins and bounty-hunting oil explorers), the harmonization of the interests of humans with the rights of the ecosystem will give rise to peace and stability. Similarly, the subsequent return of Igwezu to the city in spite of its manifest hostility is an ecocritical exhortation that a change of attitude from environmentally harmful practices, such as deforestation will give rise to a new era of harmony between wo/man and nature. Thus, in Soyinka's exhortation of attitude change toward nature-culture

harmony lies the ecocritical significance of *The Swamp Dwellers* as the poetics of sustainable development. Buell (2003) underlines the importance of a positive mental disposition to the ecosystem. He contends that the success of environmentalist efforts does not depend on highly developed technology, but on “a state of mind, attitudes and feelings” towards the ecosystem. The ecocritical thesis of *The Swamp Dwellers* is further reinforced by the fact that the play ends on a note of faith and optimism. Igwezu formally appoints the Beggar as the caretaker of his farm urging the Beggar to “then stay. Stay here and take care of the farm. I must go away” (TSD, 41). It is noteworthy that with the Beggar’s appointment as the farm caretaker, his subsisting ambition of having a piece of land to live and cultivate is actualized. This obviates the acute competition for land, about which the Beggar was initially informed that there is no land for him, as every land already belongs to someone (TSD, 17). In the end, the playwright enthrones a state of harmony among humans and between them and the nature. This in itself is a sustainable development in practice.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka grapples with the consequences of human activities on the environment. He emphasizes that the overexploitation of environmental resources is underpinned by the pervasive mindset that all the resources of the earth are useful only to the extent that they are beneficial to humankind. The playwright dramatizes the linkage between human anthropocentric impulse, which finds expression in the overexploitation of environmental resources and the subsisting problem of climate change, resulting in floods, excessive drought, pollution and poor harvests. Uzoji (2018) makes this point when he notes that “Soyinka uses the African world as an integral cosmos with a unique fluidity that makes unbroken continuity possible. There is an unbroken connection between the human spirit (gods) and nature (the environment)”. By denouncing the role of wo/man in the perpetuation of planetary crisis, the playwright exhorts a change of attitude, which recognizes the symbiosis between humans and nature, as a basis for moderation in the exploitation of environmental resources. This point finds resonance in Mwepu’s contention (2015) that the play “underlines the rational management of nature as ‘our mother’ for the sake of human and non-human existence”. It is in Soyinka’s ecopedagogical advocacy for the rational use of environmental resources for the benefit of the present and future generations that *The Swamp Dwellers* emerges as a handmaid of the contemporary principle of sustainable development.

REFERENCES

1. Acholonu, Catharine. O. (1995). *The Earth Unchained: A Quantum Leap in Consciousness*. Owerri: AFP Publications.
2. Amokaye, Oludayo, G. (2014) *Environmental Law and Practice in Nigeria* (2nd Edition). Lagos: MIJ Professional Publishers Ltd.
3. Bodansky, D. (1993). “The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: A Commentary”. *Yale J. Int.*
4. Buell, Lawrence. (2005). *The Failure of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Maiden: Blackwell Publishing.
5. Banu, N., & Mrunalini, A. (2017). *Empowering young farmers in the context of climate change*.
6. Caminero-Santangelo, Byron (2007). “Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature”. In T. Olaniyan & A. Quanyson (Eds.), *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
7. Decleris, M. (ed). *The Law of Sustainable Development, General Principles: A Report for the European Commission*. In Amokaye Oludayo, G. *Environmental Law and Practices in Nigeria* (2014)(2nd Edition). Lagos: MIJ Professional Publishers Ltd.

8. Enger, E. D. & Smith, B. F. (2006). *Environmental Science: A Study of Interrelationships* (10th edn.) Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
9. Glotfelty, C. & Fromm, H. (1996) *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
10. Gras, V. "Literary Theory and Ecology: Some Common Problems and Solutions", *Hum. Ecol. Rev.*, Vol. 8, No. 2.
11. Gumo, S. et al., (2012). "Communicating African Spirituality through Ecology: Challenges and Prospects for the 21st Century". *Religions* (3), 523–543. Doi:10.3390/rel3020523.
12. Heise, Ursula, K. (1999). "Forum on Literature of the Environment". *Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA)* 114.5: 1089–1104 www.asle.org/wp-content/uploads.
13. Jeyifo, Biodun. (2004). *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14. Layiwola, D. (1996). "The Philosophy of Wole Soyinka's Art". *J. Dram. Theory Crit.*, 2, 19–42.
15. Joshua, N. (2015). *Socio-economic valuation of information for climate change adaptation and mitigation: a case of farmers' responses in Kakamega County*. *BEST: International Journal of Humanities, Arts, Medicine and Sciences (BEST: IJHAMS)*, 3(12), 89-104.
16. Maathai, Wangari, (2009). In Toulmin, C. *Climate Change in Africa*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
17. Mwepu, Kalenga, (2015). "Postcolonial and Ecocritical Reading of Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* (1960) and *The Swamp Dwellers* (1961)", A Dissertation, Department of English Letters and Civilizations, University of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo, www.academia.edu/postcolonial-and...
18. Ogunba, Oyin. (1975). *The Movement of Transition: A Study of the plays of Wole Soyinka*. Ibadan: University Press.
19. Youssef, S. I. A. M., & Rowihil, M. S. *Impacts of climate change on oceans and coasts, basic physical and chemical phenomena influence on biological processes and fish stocks while considering the challenges and prospects for the maritime industry*.
20. Omaka, Amari. (2018). *Nigerian Conservation Law and International Environmental Treaties*. Lagos: Princeton & Associates Publishing Co. Ltd.
21. Prasanth, Aswin. "Ecology in African Literatures". In *The Creative Launcher: An Int. Refer. E-J. Eng. Volume I, Issue II*. www.thecreativelauncher.com/upload.
22. Redgwell, C. (1996). "Life, The Universe and Everything: A Critique of Anthropocentric Rights". In Boles & Anderson (eds.). *Protection of the Environment, Human Rights Approaches to Environmental Protection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
23. Slaymaker, W. "Natural Connection; Unnatural Identities: Ecocriticism in the Black Atlantic". *African Literature Association*, 1(2), 129–139. LIGO210732.
24. Wondimagegnehu, D. E. M. E. L. A. S. H., & Tadele, K. A. S. S. A. (2015). *Evaluation of climate change impact on Blue Nile Basin cascade reservoir operation*. *International Journal of Computational Sciences and Information Technology*, 1(1), 21-25.
25. Soyinka, Wole, (2010). "Swamp Dwellers Revisited": In the *New York Times*. Dec. 2. www.nytimes.com.ozih-GA11Soyinka.
26. Soyinka, Wole. (1985). "The Swamp Dwellers": In *Three Short plays*. (6th impression). Oxford: Oxford University Press. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 1992.
27. Toulmin, C. (2009). *Climate Change in Africa*. London: Zed Books Ltd.

28. Ugwuanyi, O. L. "I am Therefore Thou Are: an Existentialist Perspective on Wole Soyinka's Writings". *Unizik J. Arts Humanit.*, 12(2), 65–91. <http://dx.doi.org/10.43/ujah.v12:2.3>.
29. Uzoji, Emmanuel. "Eco-Literacy and the Planetary Crisis: Nigerian Protest Drama and the Niger-Delta Dynamics" www.academix.ng/documents/papers.

AUTHORS PROFILE



Dr. Onyekachi Eni, currently serves as a senior academic with the Department of English and Literary Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo (AE-FUNAI), Ebonyi State, Nigeria. He obtained his Ph.D in English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria in 2006. An interdisciplinary scholar, Dr Eni also holds a Master of Laws Degree (LLM) from Ebonyi State University Abakaliki in 2017 having obtained a Bachelor of Laws Degree from the same University in 2013 and Barrister at Law from the Nigeria Law School in Enugu. He was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2016. He has been with the Department of English and Literary Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo since 2015. Prior to his career in academics, Dr. Eni had served as the Chief Press Secretary to the first and second Civilian Governors of Ebonyi State between 2004-2015. He rose to the rank of Permanent Secretary in the Ebonyi State Public Service in 2015 before he left for the academia. At AE-FUNAI, Dr. Eni has held various Departmental and Faculty positions including that of Ag. Head of the Department of English and Literary Studies and member of various faculty disciplinary committees among others. His research interests include: African literature and criticism, Ecocriticism and Environmental Studies, Gender Studies and Peace Advocacy. Dr. Eni has edited a book of speeches and has published many articles in reputable peer-reviewed journals nationally and Internationally. He has attended several conferences in Nigeria and abroad where he delivered papers.

